

A.G. ASKED TO PROBE STATUS OF SALINA ENGINEER

PATRICK HENRY ONCE SAID THAT LIBERTY IS NEVER SECURE AS LONG AS GOVERNMENT DOES BUSINESS IN SECRET.

(Salina Journal) The chairman of the Senate Elections and Local Government Committee has asked Attorney General Paul Morrison to investigate the suspension and proposed conditional reinstatement of the Salina engineer who is chairman of the Smoky Hill/Saline Basin Advisory Committee.

So far, J. Neil Jednoralski, who was temporarily suspended in early March, has declined to sign a document that would clear the way for his reinstatement. On an acknowledgment document that the Kansas Water Authority asked him to sign before May 15 as a condition of his reinstatement, he wrote "Bull---- " on the signature line, according to a copy of the document he provided the Salina Journal.

Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, sent a letter to the attorney general asking Morrison to see whether Jednoralski's First Amendment rights have been violated.

"Personally, I am a strong advocate of First Amendment rights and distressed with measures and actions restricting an individual's right to free speech," Huelskamp wrote. "And unfortunately, I believe Mr. Jednoralski's First Amendment rights may have been violated in the above referenced instance."

Another condition of reinstatement is that Jednoralski remain publicly silent on the matter, Huelskamp wrote.

Jednoralski was suspended March 1 after he submitted a letter to the Salina Journal via e-mail Feb. 24. He signed the letter with his name, his profession (water resources engineer) and "Chair, Smoky Hill/Saline Basin Advisory Committee."

He also sent the document as an attachment to several other individuals and government officials. The letter wasn't published until March 3, in connection with a story about Jednoralski's suspension two days earlier.

Tracy Streeter, director of the Kansas Water Office, suspended Jednoralski because his signature could have given readers the impression the views in the letter were the official view of the basin advisory committee, Streeter said in a memo to Jednoralski. The Kansas Water Authority, which appoints basin advisory committee members, upheld Streeter's decision and gave Jednoralski until May 15 to sign the acknowledgment document.

The Water Authority's internal guidelines for basin advisory committees, adopted in June 2006, say committee members are free to express their own opinions on water issues but they must "insure that the audience understands that personal views expressed are those of the committee member and not a position or view of or in behalf of the Kansas Water Office, Kansas Water Authority or the Basin Advisory Committee."

Jednoraiski has said he did not mean to imply that the view in the letter, which addresses water regulation in Kansas and a controversy involving former Secretary of Agriculture Allie Devine, was anything but his personal opinion.

Just days earlier, on Feb. 20, the Salina Journal had notified readers of a policy change that would identify writers of letters to the editor more fully than merely name and hometown.

"Today, we begin a new policy of including a bit of identifying information about the authors of letters to the Journal," said a note in the letters section. "The change is a way to help readers better connect with letter writers, and reduce confusion when a name is shared by more than one person. Please include such information when submitting a letter."

Jednoraiski's occupation and role as chairman of the basin advisory committee are details considered relevant by the newspaper, said Scott Seirer, executive editor.

Streeter and Steve Irsik, chairman of the Kansas Water Authority, could not be reached Monday for comment.

Ashley Anstaett, a spokesman for the attorney general, confirmed the office received the letter Friday.

In his letter, Huelskamp suggested the Water Authority made its decision upholding Streeter's actions and crafting the terms for Jednoraiski's reinstatement during a closed-door session, which would be a violation of the Kansas Open Meetings Act.

"During this closed session, they apparently took formal action to offer reinstatement of Mr. Jednoralski, provided that he submits, in writing, an admission of guilt to a violation of Authority policy," Huelskamp wrote.

It's not clear what prompted Huelskamp's assertion. At its meeting April 4, the Water Authority went into closed session and, after reconvening to open session, voted to affirm Jednoralski's suspension until at least June 1.

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